



**Testimony of Melanie Sue Collins, MD, Pediatric Pulmonologist
and Jessica Hollenbach, PhD
at Connecticut Children's
to the Appropriations Committee regarding
Senate Bill 399- *An Act Concerning the Tobacco Settlement Trust Fund and the Sale of
Tobacco Products***

March 24, 2022

Senator Osten, Representative Walker and other esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share our support of Senate Bill 399, *An Act Concerning the Tobacco Settlement Trust Fund and the Sale of Tobacco Products*.

Our names are Dr. Melanie Sue Collins and Dr. Jessica Hollenbach and, respectively, we work as a Pediatric Pulmonologist and as Co-Directors of the Asthma Center at Connecticut Children's. We are submitting this testimony in support of this proposed legislation because we believe that prevention efforts are effective and necessary to prevent adolescents from trying and becoming addicted to harmful nicotine and tobacco products.

Before commenting on the bill, we want to provide some background about Connecticut Children's. Connecticut Children's is a nationally recognized, 187-bed not-for-profit children's hospital driving innovation in pediatrics. With over 2,800 employees, more than 1,300 on our medical staff and locations spread across our region, we are Connecticut's only independent children's health system.

Tobacco and vaping products contain harmful substances such as heavy metals, volatile organic compounds, cancer causing chemicals, and ultrafine particles that are inhaled deeply into the lungs. We also know that just one JUUL pod can contain as much nicotine as 20 cigarettes and that over 2,807 Americans have suffered severe lung damage due to EVALI (E-cigarette, or Vaping, Product Use-Associated Lung Injury). Despite these scary facts, 1 in 10 ninth graders and 1 in 5 twelfth graders are currently using e-cigarettes (Connecticut Youth Tobacco Survey, 2017). Studies from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also demonstrate that nicotine use in adolescence may increase the risk of future addiction to other drugs. As pediatricians and as policymakers, we should be doing all that we can to prevent children from being exposed to this harmful and addictive practice.

We are pleased to see the proposal for additional investments from the Tobacco Settlement Fund allocated towards programs to reduce tobacco abuse through prevention, education, and cessation programs. Connecticut Children's recently joined the Department of Public Health's (DPH) Tobacco Program in [publishing a report](#) demonstrating that clinicians were not confident in providing smoking cessation counseling to parents of children visiting their pediatric practices. Investment from the Tobacco Settlement Fund could help support more physician training and education regarding tobacco prevention/cessation best practices.

We would also encourage state leaders to invest these funds in evidence-based asthma management programs, which support primary care pediatricians in their efforts to diagnose and

treat asthma – a condition caused by and exacerbated by exposure to tobacco smoke. For example, Connecticut Children’s Easy Breathing Program has been remarkably effective from this perspective — leading to a 35% decrease in hospitalizations for asthma, 27% decrease in emergency department visits for asthma, and 19% decrease in outpatient visits for the patient population. This effort is particularly important for children with asthma exposed to environmental tobacco smoke. We have shown that children with asthma enrolled in the Easy Breathing program have greater disease severity when exposed to second-hand smoke.

Please note that in addition to this testimony, we have also included a fact sheet on Easy Breathing.

Lastly, we are supportive of the provision of SB 399, which would require all persons 21 or older to present proof of age in order to purchase tobacco products.

Thank you for your consideration of this position. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Emily Boushee (eboushee@connecticutchildrens.org), Government Relations Associate for Connecticut Children’s with any questions.